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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUCHAREST 001499

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION PARTY FIGURE, BASESCU POLITICAL ADVISOR
NOMINATED TO HEAD ROMANIAN INTELLIGENCE SERVICES

REF: BUCHAREST 1171

Classified By: Classified by DCM Mark Taplin for Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)
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¶1. (C) Summary: In a surprise move, President Traian Basescu nominated George Maior, a senator of the opposition Social-Democratic Party (PSD), to head the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI). Basescu's move has discomfited his coalition partners in the PNL, and breaks with a longstanding tradition of SRI chiefs coming from the main governing party or from among the close collaborators of the President. At the same time, Basescu also proposed one of his closest political advisors, Claudiu Saftoiu, to head the foreign intelligence service (SIE). Basescu's picks are expected to be voted by Parliament in a joint session in the first week of October. Both Maior and Saftoiu are young - under forty - and have no apparent ties with the communist regime or with the communist secret service, the infamous Securitate. They both have strong track records as supporters of close U.S.-Romanian cooperation. End summary.

¶2. (C) Romanian President Traian Basescu September 25 announced the nomination of George Maior, a senator of the main opposition Social-Democratic Party (PSD), and Claudiu Saftoiu, presidential advisor on domestic politics, to head the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI) and the Foreign Intelligence Service (SIE), respectively. The former SRI and SIE directors, together with the Ministry of Defense's director of intelligence resigned in July in the wake of the disappearance and flight of Omar Hayssam, a businessman of Syrian origin accused of complicity in the kidnapping in Iraq in 2005 of three Romanian journalists (Reftel). Parliament must now approve in a joint session--based on a simple majority of deputies and senators--the nominations put forward by President Basescu.

¶3. (SBU) PSD president Mircea Geoana told the press on September 25 that the decision of the president was "bold" and that it would put an end to the "total warfare" between ruling and opposition parties, or to the use of intelligence services as a political weapon. Geoana suggested that the naming of an opposition representative as SRI head should become a "new rule" in Romanian politics. PD president, Emil Boc, remarked that Basescu's decision was a sign of "political normality," as bridges between the government and the opposition needed to be created in any democratic system. PNL leaders, on the other hand, received the news with evident dismay, decrying the lack of consultation over the move by its ostensible coalition partner and openly fretting over the prospect that this rapprochement could signal a move to replace the PNL with the PSD as a coalition partner.

¶4. (C) In a similar vein, Geoana telephoned Ambassador September 26 to laud President Basescu's choices for the two positions, noting that both were younger individuals with no

links to Ceausescu's Securitate. Geoana related that Maior had "begged" him not to be nominated for the position of SRI Director, saying he would be "cut to pieces" politically during the confirmation process. Geoana added that he had subsequently discussed the issue with Basescu, making the point that this had to be a serious effort rather than a mere political gesture. Geoana expressed confidence that Maior's nomination would be approved without difficulty but said Saftiou's nomination might attract more objections from PNL deputies. Ultimately, however, the Prime Minister was not interested in a losing "war" with the President over the issue, Geoana reported. He also noted that he had received assurances from PRM party head Vadim Tudor that the PRM would abstain, but would "indirectly support" the two candidacies. Geoana expressed his hope that the Embassy would support the two candidates and also urged the Ambassador to support his proposal for a permanent "rule change" of have the SRI position reserved for opposition parties. Ambassador did not respond to the latter request.

15. (C) In a phone conversation with DCM September 26, Saftiou said that he was "very confident" that his nomination would be approved. He said he was not expecting any special problems in his parliamentary review. Asked whether congratulations or condolences were in order, Saftiou replied, "probably both."

16. (C) Comment: President Basescu's decision to entrust the top position of the most important intelligence service to the main opposition party came as surprise move, breaking a longstanding tradition of Presidents naming their closest collaborators to head the intelligence services. The nomination of Saftiou and Major to head the intelligence services is also seen as an adroit riposte to arguments from

BUCHAREST 00001499 002 OF 002

the Prime Minister Tariceanu's Liberal Party allies that the positions should go to "clean" civilians rather than professional intelligence officers. Naming an SRI head from the leading opposition party neatly undercuts PNL claims that Basescu is using the domestic intelligence service as a political instrument even while it serves notice to the PNL that the PD is willing to openly court the Social Democrats as a future coalition partner. While the anti-Basescu voices within the Prime Minister's camp expressed frustration over the naming of Maior and Saftiou, Tariceanu himself has decided to resist any open political confrontation with the President on this point, just as Geoana predicted. Instead, according to the PM's chief of staff Mihnea Constantinescu, Tariceanu will emphasize to the media if he is pressed to comment on the matter that today's news of Romania's EU accession in 2007 dwarfs the importance of the naming of new intelligence chiefs "by a factor of ten to one." End Comment.

17. (C) Biographic Note: Both nominees are youthful civilians with a solid background in security matters, albeit with no evident connections with the former communist political, military or intelligence structures. Both are well and favorably known to the Embassy and have demonstrated a transatlantic orientation and willingness to work closely with the USG. George Maior, 39, is a law graduate with studies of international comparative law in the U.S. He joined the Romanian Foreign Service in 1992 where he served until 2000. In 2000, Maior became secretary of state for euro-Atlantic integration and defense policy in the Ministry of Defense, directly responsible for Romania's successful bid to join the NATO and for start of the negotiations with the U.S. on the Defense Cooperation Agreement. In 2004, Maior ran for the Senate on the PSD list and later assumed the chairmanship of the Senate's defense committee. Claudiu Saftiou is one of the closest collaborators of President Basescu. Saftiou, 38, is a graduate in arts and letters and had a long career as a journalist before joining the presidential staff as the senior presidential advisor on domestic politics. Saftiou's name was floated last year to

be the next the head of the recently established National Community for Intelligence, and he played a key role in drafting the new legislation on intelligence and security currently under debate in Parliament.

Taubman